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Introduction

This book focuses on three important strands of contemporary narrative psychology, centring on pioneering figures advocating the narrative approach in three different locations: North America, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand. In the US, an approach to self and identity as a life story has been developed during the last 2 decades by Dan McAdams and his followers. The collaborative efforts of Michael White in Australia and David Epston in New Zealand helped to launch the narrative movement in therapy in the late 1980s. At the same time, Hubert Hermans's research activity on the dialogical self in the Netherlands has made the University of Nijmegen a centre of dialogical research in psychology in Europe, culminating in the International Conference on Dialogical Self. These conferences have become a major forum for psychologists from different countries and continents sharing a common interest in dialogism.

McAdams's narrative identity, Hermans's dialogical self theory and White and Epston's narrative therapy evidence certain clear commonalities: all of them address meaning and intention I human lives; all three are rooted not only in psychological discourse but also in philosophy and interdisciplinary cultural theory; all of them borrow key metaphors from literary studies and literature; all of them encompass theoretical issues, research methods and therapeutic intervention simultaneously. Importantly, all three also engage with political debates. There are, however, some substantial differences particularly evident in the respective treatment of such issues as coherence of the self versus its decentred character; stability and continuity of self versus malleability, fluidity and change; and, last but not least, value judgements on whether some stories are better than others. This last raises an important issue of ethics in psychological theorizing and practice.

To a large extent, the differences between the three approaches can be attributed to their respective positions along a continuum that ranges from modern to postmodern views (Neimeyer and Raskin 2000). In this book I investigate how narrative is mobilized by each of the approaches, how fully the heuristic power of the construct of narrative is unpacked by each, and what aspects of the concepts as yet remain untapped. Specifically, I explore the conceptualization of the subject, the issue of psychological transformation, and the methodology offered by each of the approaches, concluding with an analysis of the ethical implications of each of the perspectives. If the narrative approach is often described as a critique of dominant trends in contemporary psychology, both theoretical and applied, the present project also assesses how far such critique goes and how it can be expanded further.

2.2 Dan McAdams: Identity as a life story

In the US, the narrative approach was powerfully articulated and pursued by McAdams and his followers. Drawing on William James's, Jerome Bruner's, Theodore Sarbin's and Erik Erikson's work, McAdams (1985) proposed a life story model of identity, which implies that narrative accounts of people's lives, constructed as evolving stories imbued with a sense of integrity and continuity, represent the core of personality. By the early 1990s McAdams (1993,

1994) had further developed his model to describe personality on three levels: the level of dispositional traits, the level of personal concerns and the level of life narrative. On the first level, personality is characterized through broad, non-conditional, relatively decontextualized, linear, and implicitly comparative constructs (traits). While acknowledging that this traits level is important in providing a dispositional description, McAdams argues that such description does not tell much beyond a ' psychology of the stranger', and that to go beyond this level one should seek information that is conditional and contextualized. This kind of description can be obtained on a second level. Here, at the level of 'personal concerns', 'personality description invokes personal striving, life tasks, defence mechanisms, coping strategies, domain-specific skills and values, and a wide assortment of other motivational, developmental, or strategic constructs that are conceptualized in terms of time, place, or role' (McAdams 1995:365). However, as McAdams notes, although strivings and goals are indicative of what a person is trying to do, 'they are not enough to tell the psychologist who a person is trying to be, or […] what person the person is trying to make' (1994:306). Thus, the third level of personality concerns 'the making of the self'. McAdams conceives this process of identity-making that lends a sense of meaning and unity to human lives as 'an internalized and evolving story that integrates a reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future into a coherent and vitalizing life myth'(1994:306).

Reflecting on a quarter century of his own research and the work of other psychologists who study life stories, McAdams (2008a) has identified six common principles in the narrative study of lives. According to *principle 1*, the self is storied.

Principle 2 maintains that stories integrate lives. While stories do many things- entertain, educate, inspire, motivate – among their most important functions is synthesis: stories bring elements of lived experience and mental processing that were previously separate into a coherent and understandable whole. *Principle 3* underscores that stories are told in social relationships and as such represent social phenomena, guided by societal expectations and norms. *Principle 4* emphasizes that stories change over time. While autobiographical memory is notoriously unstable, the life story is also subject to more profound changes over time, reflecting shifts in how a person comes to terms with the social world across the lifespan. *Principle 5* asserts that stories live in and mirror the culture wherein the story is created and told. *Principle 6* addresses the ethical dimension of narrative identity and suggests that some stories are 'better' than others.

By contrast, 'The New Big Five' encompasses five broad and inter-related concepts that include but are not reducible to traits; they are: evolution, traits, adaptations, life narratives and culture. This framework conceives of personality as '(1) an individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of (2) dispositional traits, (3) characteristic adaptations, and (4) self-defining life narratives, complexly and differentially situated in (5) culture and social contexts' (McAdams 2008a: 248). This model reflects a growing trend in psychological theorizing towards integrative approaches that cut across interdisciplinary and methodological divides and address the principal subject of psychological research – the living human being – in a holistic and comprehensive manner (McAdams and Pals 2006; Sheldon 2004; Singer 2005).

Polkinghorne (1996) outlined three important sets of concerns that would prove to be the major points of debate throughout later developments of McAdams's theorizing. First. Polkinghorne

questions what kind of relationship is intended among the levels postulated in McAdams's model. Second, he raises the question of historical situatedness of the kind of narrative identity that McAdams proposes. Finally, Polkinghorne highlights potential limitations of an identity model being reduced to story, to the exclusion of non-verbal realities of psychological experience.

Polkinghorne notes that the relationship between different levels within McAdams's model – traits, situational responses (goals and Struggles), and narrative identity – is not clearly specified. Polkinghorn observes that McAdams's position can be read in three different was. First, McAdams's ideas can be thought of as advocating 'equal partnership type of relationship' between the three domains of traits, life struggles and goals, and narrative identity. But in this case Polkinghorn argues that the framework McAdams proposes 'is simply an enlargement of the personality psychology circle to encompass the recent developments in narrative psychology' (1996:364). Polkinghorne further points out the McAdams also employs a second way of conceptualizing the relationship between the levels, where they are depicted as partially overlapping, with the narrative approach privileged over situational and trait approaches because of its capacity to serve as a higher order discourse. From this position, it is through inclusion in narrative that traits and situational become invested with meaning and integrated 'into the unfolding drama by which people understand who they are' (Polkinghorne 1996:364). In this model the narrative approach provides a lens through which researches can view personality, rendering its elements (such as traits) parts of an integrated story. Finally, in Polkinghorne's reading, the ranking scheme and labelling levels with numbers employed by McAdams implies a hierarchical relationship between the levels, where narrative identity, placed at Level III, is privileged over the other two.

The second set of concerns that Polkinghorne outlines tackles the issue of the historical situatedness of McAdams's model of identity as a life story. Polkinghorne notes that it appears that this model is proposed as a universal explanatory paradigm, presenting narrative identity as a necessary component of personality for all humans' regardless of historical, geographical and cultural differences between human societies. From Polkinghorne's perspective, the narrative identity formation that McAdams outlines is not necessary in pre-industrial societies, where 'a relatively authoritative and consistent set of answers to people's identity concerns' was provided. This created the requisite conditions for 'unproblematic' 'assimilation of and incorporation of the culture's storied answers to [people's] questions of identity' (Polkinghorn 1996:364). Polkinghorne argues that the pressing need to construct identity and to use narrative resources for doing this arises with the move into the post-industrial Western period, a period of transition, presenting people with multiple and conflicting stories as a resource for their identity building rather than a unified set of identity scenarios. McAdams responded to this set of questions by firmly linking his model of identity as a life story with modernity and pitting it against the postmodern understanding of self and identity.

The third set of concerns raised by Polkinghorne relates to the linguistic reductionism and disembodied character of McAdams's narrative identity model. Polikinghorn argues that the emphasis on narrative implies that identity can be transparently translated into language. For Polkinghorne, however, 'There are significant differences between the identity story as it is lived and the story as it is told' (Polkinghorne 1996:365). He suggests that the identity formation process id guided not by rational Cartesian subject, but rather by Merleau-Ponty's 'body-subject', which represents not a substance but an integrated, embodied activity. Its

manner of operation is holistic, emotionally informed, metaphorical and analogical. Polikinghorne draws on Ricoeur's contention that the fullness of a person's operating identity story is not accessible to him or herself through (phenomenological) reflection. When experiential meaning of identity is expressed in language it is converted into literary forms and affected by the audiences to whom these are communicated. Polkinghorne insists that it is important to differentiate the life stories gathered through narrative research and experientially functioning identity stories, which are conflated in McAdams's writing.

2.3 Hubert Hermans: The Dialogical Self Theory

Thus, feeling the need to acknowledge the intrapsychological aspects of personality functioning and its developing character, Hermans began to elaborate the self-confrontation method encompassing a narrative understanding of person. The method was intended to provide solutions to the problems that Hermans had encountered earlier. It was supposed to (a) enable clients to construct stories about their lives according to the meaning they attribute to different events – and not to be guided by one or several variable imposed by a researchers; (b) facilitate a gradual transition from assessment to therapeutic change; and finally (c) be based on a cooperative rather than on an objectifying relationship between counsellor and client.

The self-confrontation method is based on *valuation theory*, which defines the self as an 'organized process of valuation' – a construction of the meaning of events as positive, negative or ambivalent (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen 1995). In the application of the self-confrontation method Hermans discovered that some valuations demonstrated changes that were significant from a therapeutic point of view and that it was precisely the combination of stability and change that was characteristic of an effective therapeutic process.

Hermans and Kempen insisted that the very notion of narrative or story is already always dialogical, since it presupposes the existence of a teller and an actual or imagined presence of a listener or audience. To extend these considerations, Hermans and Kempen further mobilized Bakhtin's dialogical approach, in particular the notion of the polyphonic novel.

For Hermans, dialogue is not restricted to different parts of the self, but also encompasses a dialogical relationship between an individual and the outside world. Redefining G. H. Mead's (1934) notion of 'generalised other' within the dialogical paradigm as a 'collective voice', Hermans and Kempen demonstrate how collective voices speak through the voice of an individual person.

Hermans challenges both the idea of a core, essential self and the idea of a core, essential culture, and proposes to conceive self and culture as a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relationships can be established. Cultures and selves begin to be seen as moving and mixing and as increasingly sensitive to travel and translocality. Particular attention is paid to collective voices, domination and asymmetry of social relations, and embodied forms of dialogue. Two critical dimensions of tis larger context of individuals' functioning are exchange and social power. While exchange for Hermans relates primarily to the respective taking of different positions by partners of dialogues and their real or imaginative exchange necessary for understanding, power is always embedded in this relationship – the positions can never be equal, and always reflect or are predetermined by power balances originating in a socio-cultural order.

Hermans's most recent works expand the dialogical self theory (DST) to address new intrapsychological and social issues. In addition to the core assumptions of DST, in The Dialogical Self: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) explore such issues as the impact of globalization and localization on self and identity; self and identity in historical perspective; and practical implications of DST for organizations, motivation and conflict resolution.

The authors start by addressing an issue that is both psychological and political: how the self and identity operate and are to be understood in the context of globalization and localization. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka argue that a dialogical conceptualization of self and identity in which global and local voices are involved in continuous interchanges and negotiations provides a promising avenue for addressing the most pressing issues of our time, such as the growing uncertainty that motivates individuals and groups to find local niches for identity on three levels – individual, local and global – paying particular attention to the increasing number of voices and counter voices, the role of social power, and the role of emotions.

Another useful innovation in this book is the addition of historical perspective on the issues of self and identity. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka outline three different perspectives on self, associated with different historical phases – traditional, modern and postmodern – and discuss advantages and 'shadow sides' of each of the perspectives. They then suggest that the dialogical model of self provides a framework that can allow for the negotiation between these perspectives. This is important given that different perspectives do not succeed each other, but rather aspects of these different perspectives coexist in a contemporary society that raises significant challenges for contemporary identity building efforts.

2.4 Michael White and David Epston: Narrative Therapy

White and Epston's 1989 book *Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends* (republished a year later as *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*) presents a narrative therapeutic model and outlines their understanding of the boarder socio-cultural and political contexts that affect a person's psychological functioning, the genesis of psychological problems and the nature of therapists' engagements with their clients. In Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends White and Epston also elaborate an analogy that they had previously outlined in a number of single-authored articles, of therapy as a process of "storying" and/or "re-storying" of people's lives and experiences (Espton 1985, 1986; White 1984, 1988). In particular, they draw on Brunner's idea that narrative is constructed within a dual landscape: a landscape of action comprises events and experiences: the who, what, where and when of a story. The landscape of consciousness encompasses the meaning that people ascribe to experiences and events and reveals how a person's desires, values, beliefs, intentions and motives are implicated in the production of meaning.

White and Epston suggest that the particular story a person in constructing about his/her life is always selective and never includes all the facts related to this person's functioning. When a problem-saturated story becomes dominant, people have greater and greater difficulties coping with their life, filtering problem-free experiences out of their memory and perception. Adopting Geertz's (1973) notion of 'thick description', White and Epston develop a method of multifaceted description of human life, as a result of which other descriptions can surface and become a therapeutic resources for the reconstruction of a more effective life story.

Significantly, this narrative view of therapy is embedded within a broader framework of understanding of human functioning largely inspired by Michel Foucault's ideas. In particular, White and Epston draw on Foucault's understanding of power as on the one hand dominant and constraining and on the other constitutive. They emphasize that a primary effect of power is the production of a particular form of individually, 'an individuality that is, in turn, a "vehicle" of power' (White and Espton 190:20). They further acknowledge the particular historical form that the interaction of power and knowledge can take, maintaining that the modern form of power cannot be understood from an internal point of view. In light of these considerations, they argue that therapists, counsellors and other psychology workers are also implicated in maintaining and generating a particular power imbalance and have to accept responsibility for this. Thus, White and Epston insist that therapeutic practice is inevitably political.

The assumptions about the effect of power on the construction of subjectivity and self-knowledge penetrate deeply into White and Epston's view of how 'presenting problems', as they are known in therapeutic practice, emerge and how they are to be treated. This is evident in their elaboration of three broad aims of therapy: the externalization of the problem; the identification of unique outcomes, and the construction of alternative stories. "Externalising". Write White and Epston, 'is an approach to therapy that encourages persons to objectify and, at times, to personify the problems that they experience as oppressive. In the process, the problem becomes a separate entity and thus external to the person of relationship that was previously ascribed as the problem' (1990: 38). Externalization of the problem implies simultaneous identification and separation of persons from unitary knowledges and truth discourses – including various ideological positions and diagnostic categories – that subjugate them. Ny means of externalizing of the problem and generating a 'thick description' persons 'are able to identify previously neglected but vital aspects of lived experiences' that White, employing Goffman's terminology, defines as 'unique outcomes'. Unique outcomes present evidence of defiance of the power of the problem, and become instrumental in generating new meaning, Furthermore, following Bruner's argument, White insists that the process of narrative therapy should aim to 'initiate performances of meaning rather than actually formulating meaning [itself]' (Bruner quoted in White and Epston 1990:79). Thus, the provision of space for the performance of alternative, previously neglected or subjugated knowledges is central to the therapeutic endeavour,

In a number of later works White and Espton develop and refine the principles and methods of narrative therapy, including re-authoring and re-membering conversations, definitional and outsider witness ceremonies, and using written documents – letters, certificates and poetry (Espton 1997). In doing so they further draw on poststructuralist ideas regarding the constitution of lives and the role of discursive and textual practices (White 1997), In White's final book Maps of Narrative Practice (2007) he extends his conceptual apparatus by drawing on Lev Vygotsky's (1986) cultural-historical theory and introducing a general principle of scaffolding as a main axis that undergirds the therapeutic engagement. The concept of 'scaffolding' is derived from Vygotsky's ideas about semiotic mediation and interiorization, as well as the notion of the zone of proximal development. Noting that people generally consult therapists when they are having difficulty in proceeding with their lives and might need to start thinking about the experimenting with what might be possible rathe than what is familiar and known, White defines the gap between the two as a 'zone of proximal development". In the context of therapeutic practice, '[t]his zone can be traversed though conversation partnerships

that provide the necessary scaffolding to achieve this – that is , the sort of scaffolding that provides the opportunity for people to proceed across this zone in manageable steps'

2.5 Narrative Psychology: Limitations, Tensions and Challenges

With regard to the first theme, the relationship between narrative and self, Smith and Sparkes point out that some narrative researchers view narrative and self as inseparable or identical, advancing the position that either the narrative is our identity, or that a self or identity is narrative. By contrast, other researchers argue that drawing equivalence between narrative and identity runs the risk of linguistic reductionism and take the position that self is instead produced in the process of telling of stories.

The second tension within this theme concerns the issue of unity of self, with some researches arguing for a unified and purposeful self, imbued with integrating and synthesizing capacities, while others see self as multiple, fragmented and unfinished. From this perspective identity is understood as a 'performative struggle, always destabilized and deferred' (Smith and Sparkes 2006:175).

A third tension concerns the issue of temporal coherence. While one camp of narrative psychologists insists that there is an inherent demand for a coherent and stable psychological identity, another allows for temporal discontinuity and fragmentation. These scholars tend to conceptualized coherence as an accomplishment, relational and interactional.

Theme two focuses on the 'ontology or nature of narrative" and comprises tensions arising from different positions with regards to (neo) realist versus relativism; interiority versus externality; and the use of the notion of constructivism. The debates concerning the (neo) realist understanding of self versus the relativist perspective are grounded in two opposing views. The (neo) realists are committed to the view that there is a reality out there, 'independent of us, which can be known – at least in principle' (Smith and Sparkes 2006:178). Against this view, the relativity position argues that no claims can be made 'for the existence of foundations, of a reality outside of ourselves that can be known objectively through, for example, the appropriate use of procedures or techniques' (Smith and Sparkes 2006:179). According to the latter, then, theory-free observation or knowledge is impossible; knowledge – including our understating of self, identity and subjectivity – is always socially constructed and always fallible.

Closely connected to the tension between (neo) realist and relativist perspectives is the issue of how much weight is given to the 'individual', 'subjectivity', 'experience', and the 'personal and real' or 'natural' selves in a particular narrative perspective. Some scholars insist on preserving some sense of interiority, privileging the active engagement of the individual person in the process of self-construction and acknowledging the 'real' nature of individual subjectivity. Other narrative researchers, however, challenge and undermine the recourse to real inner core and emphasize the social aspects of narrative in the formation of the self, such as the fact that identities are constructed in situated relationships and depend on social positioning. Furthermore, these scholars underline the use of semiotic practices and linguistic resources on which individuals draw when constructing their self.

Smith and Sparkes further illuminate a related tension surrounding the use of the word 'construction' in different narrative perspectives. For those scholars who insist on the given core or authentic subjectivity, the self can be described as a natural phenomenon, which can be 'found' in the inner depths of one's consciousness where it was waiting to be discovered and

revealed to the world. By comparison, scholars who theorize the process of narrative identity formation using the concept of construction demonstrate quite a different understanding: for them there is no private, interior self to be discovered; the self is produced and formed through a variety of social and semantic practices. An important implication of a constructivist view is that it allows greater freedom to re-construct and re-arrange the sense of self, thus 'granting people the greatest opportunities and possible freedoms for transformation' (Smith and Sparkles 2006:183).

3.2 Life Story: Identity, Subject and Subjectivity in McAdams's Approach

As Vollmer (2005) notes, identity for McAdams is hidden inside of us. It is based on material that has been 'gathered' beforehand: Even before we consciously know what a story is, we are gathering material for a self-defining story we will someday compose' (McAdams 1993:13). The self, for McAdams, is discovered when this unconscious story is brought to light and made explicit through narrative. As Vollmer explains, McAdams posits that 'what we do when we explicitly tell or write a story, is not an act of creating our self, but an act of *describing* something that has already been created, of revealing what is already there but hidden' (Vollmer 2005:202).

Vollmer highlights that the essentialism of McAdams's position is also evident in his idea that self-descriptive stories convey the truth about the inner self, the truth that has been known to the teller all along. The sense of self is given and clearly pre-dates its narrative rendering: as McAdams concedes, the story is 'there all along, inside the mind. It is a psychological structure that evolves slowly over time, infusing life with unity and purpose. An interview can elicit aspects of that, offering me hints concerning the truth already in place in the mind of the teller' (McAdams 1993:20). Importantly, narrative capacity as such and narrative as a form of organizing the flow of experience and consciousness represent a *given* for McAdams as well.

McAdmas's emphasis on the synthesis and integration of the self as key functions of narrative identity further demonstrates his broader allegiance to modernist assumptions in psychology. McAdams attributes particular importance to the internal coherence of the life story:

> People construct stories to make sense of their lives; therapists and their clients co-construct new narratives to replace disorganized or incoherent stories of self; lives become meaningful and coherent (or not) amidst the welter of social constructions and discourses that comprise contemporary postmodern life. It follows, furthermore, that story construction – at the level of the individual, group, and even culture – moves (ideally) in the direction of coherence. (McAdams 2006a: 110)

McAdams further provides arguments in support of the view that narrative coherence represents an ideal – or least desirable – pole of identity construction. First and foremost, he notes, since stories exist to be told, they need to be understood – and thus they need to comply with certain culturally produced expectations regarding time, intention, goals, causality and closure. Thus, narrative coherence promotes communication, while lack of coherence hinders it. Further, coherence is instrumental in assisting a generation of causal explanation, which for McAdams represents another important function of life narrative: 'If a life story is to make psychological sense then, it must explain how a person came to be (and who a person may be in the future)' (McAdams 2006a:114).

3.3 The Dialogical Self Theory: Towards Decentralization

According to Hermans, the model of dialogical self assumes a far-reaching decentralization of both self and society. Hermans's DST weaves two concepts, self and dialogue, together in such a way that a more profound understanding of the interconnection of self and society is achieved. Hermans extends the narrative theorizing of subject and self by emphasizing the role of the other.

Cruically, though, it is Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue, multivoicedness and polyphony that allows Hermans to decentralize the self. Following Bakhtin, in Hermans's model there is no provision for an overarching I that organizes the constituents of Me. Instead, the polyphonic character of the organization leads to the supposition of a decentralized multiplicity of I-positions that function like relatively independent authors. The DST thus addresses the coherence of the self within the context of the intrinsic separateness of different contrasting I-positions.

Hermans's view is considerably different from McAdams's with regard to the unity and centredness of the self- the former is much more in favour of multiple and decentred understanding. Hermans is also not in accord with McAdams's understanding of narrative coherence as the criterion of 'good story'.

Incoherence is theorized by Hermans as a multiplicity of I-positions that can be articulated, explored, and brought into dialogical or polyvocal communication. Furthermore, the dialogical self incorporates collective voices that are conceived as being both inside and outside the self. In this way the dialogical self bridges the divide between individual and social, overthrowing the individualistic construction of self 'within the skin'. Thus, Hermans maintains that 'the dialogical self distances itself from any autonomy between self and society. As a multiplicity of voices, the self functions as a society and is, at the same time, part of a broader society' (Hermans 2001c: 59). For Hermans, this aspect of the dialogical conceptualization of the self holds particular promise in the postmodern context, where individuals have to deal with 'a high density of voices, a large heterogeneity of voices, and rapid shifting among opposing, contradicting, and conflicting voices' (Hermans 2001c: 59). From this position Hermans urges a rethinking of the problem of the unity versus multiplicity of self, and positions his dialogical self as a solution to the following conundrum:

In my view, the basic issue for the future theorizing in the realm of self and identity is not the opposition between unity and fragmentation with unity seen as desirable and fragmentation as undesirable. Rather, the issue is the relation between unity and multiplicity. Dialogue has the potential to transform fragmentation into constructive multiplicity. (Hermans 2001c: 59)

In the postmodern self Hermans and Hermans-Konopka high-light an 'emphasis on difference, otherness, local knowledge' and 'a far reaching decentralization of the subject, whose stable sense of identity and biographical continuity give way to fragmentation' (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010: 114). The authors see as a valuable achievement of postmodernism the tendency to acknowledge the impacts of history, language communities, social conventions, globalization, networks and technology as factors relevant to the construction of the self in a contemporary world. However, they emphasize that, while liberating the self from the confines of the encapsulated and centralized structure of the modern self, the postmodern self does not make provision for a solid basis for an engaged agency.

3.4 Narrative Therapy: Between Subjectivation and Agency

On the basis of narrative therapy's commitment to agency and self-directionality, some critics argue that White and Epston's understanding of the subject has affinity with the modernist paradigm. Along these lines Polkinghorne suggests that 'narrative therapists were selective in what they drew from postmodern writers. Some of the postmodern ideas, such as the centrality of language and discourse, were adopted, whereas other themes, such as the rejection of the creative subject, were not adopted' (Polkinghorne 2004:54). Polkinghorne argues that narrative therapy places at its core the notion of a creative, authorial, self-constructing subject. His verdict is that narrative therapy 'primarily makes use of existential themes, such as self-agency, empowerment, and responsibility, in its therapeutic work while using postmodern themes for diagnostic purposes' (Polkinghorne 2004:54)

White and Epston observe that the people who consult them often share beliefs related to a sense of failure to achieve certain expectations, to replicate certain specifications, or to meet certain norms. These expectations, specifications and norms embody 'normalizing judgments' in the modern discourse of power, which define successful personhood as 'the encapsulated self' and emphasize a form of autonomy and independence that is characterized by self-possession, self-containment, self-reliance, self-motivation and self-actualization. 'The very concept', notes White, 'of "autonomous and independent action" and for that matter, of what it means to be a "real" or "authentic" person – is founded upon these constructed norms, and an inability to reproduce these norms categorizes people as "personal failures in their own and each other's eyes"'(White 2007:268).

Yet, in *Maps of Narrative Practice* White re-articulates his view on personal agency as associated with 'intentional state understanding of identity, whereby people are seen as living out their lives in line with their intentions and values' (White 2007: 103). This raises an important question of how Foucault's idea of the discursively constituted subject can be sustained alongside White's commitment to a subject imbued with the power of agency.

4.2 McAdams's Life Stories and 'The Making of the Self'

Identity stability involves longitudinal consistency in a life story. Identity transformation – identity crisis, identity change – involves story revision. Such story revisions may range from minor *editing* of an obscure chapter to a complete *rewriting* of the text, embodying an altered *plot*, a different *cast of characters*, a transformed *setting*, new *scenes* and new *themes* (McAdams 1985: 18).

In line with his move towards broader integrative models of self, identity and culture, McAdams (2015) recently re-conceptualized and development of narrative identity by introducing a tripartite model of the psychological self as actor, agent and author. This model construes the constructed *Me*, evolving and expanding over the human life course. This trajectory is underpinned by the question "what might the I see and know when it reflectively encounters the *Me*?' McAdams contends that human selves come to know themselves from three different psychological perspectives: first as social actors who perform on a social stage, then as motivated agents who set forth an agenda for the future, and finally as autobiographical authors engaged in producing meaning-making self-reflective narratives. Each of the three corresponds thus 'to three developmental layers of psychological selfhood, emerging at different points in ontogeny and following their own respective developmental trajectories over the human life course' (McAdams 2013:273).

McAdams contends that the self first enters the stage as a social actor, aiming to regulate itself in order to perform in the here and now, shortly before or around the second birthday. The knowledge that the *I* acquires about the *Me* at the stage encompasses semantic representation of traits, social roles and other features of the self implicated in social performances. As the person moves into middle childhood individual agency begins to be magnified and refined. The self as motivated agent focuses on goals and other anticipated end states and works towards their accomplishments. Gradually the *I* starts to perceive the *Me* as forward looking and future orientated, characterized by motives, values, hopes and fears. In late adolescence and adulthood, an autobiographical author emerges as the I now aims to create a story about the Me, that would make meaning of the reconstructed past, experienced present and anticipated future:

> [T]he autobiographical author works to formulate a meaningful narrative for life, integrating the reconstructed episodic past, and the imagined episodic future in such a way as to explain, for the self and for others, why the actor does what it does, why the agent wants what it wants, and who the self was, is, and will be as a developing person in time. (McAdams 2013:273)

McAdams reviews evidence regarding research on autobiographical reasoning and concludes that young adults possess skills of mature self-authorship evidence in (a) deriving organizing themes in their life stories; (b) sequencing memories of the events into causal chains in order to explain their development; (c) articulating the theme of personal growth over time; (d) formulating clear beginnings and endings in their life narrative accounts; and € incorporating foreshadowing and reflection on the past.

McAdams insists that the efforts of all three components of selfhood and determined by one overarching agenda: 'Put simply, the *I* seeks enhance the *Me* – to make it bigger, stronger, and more excellent. The *I* also seeks to make the *Me* consistent, understandable, and predictable' (McAdams 2013: 290). Within the complex interplay of actor, agent and author the perspective of the latter seems to McAdams to be 'especially germane for the *I*'s efforts to enhance the *Me* and to construct a Me that seems consistent and verifiable' (McAdams 2013: 291). Thus, just as coherence represents the central vector and value in McAdams's understanding of the narrative subject, continuity represents the central vector of the development of narrative identity.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka postulate centring and decentring movements on each level of self-organization. Centring movements go in the direction of the centre of the shelf, towards order and perfect integration. Decenring movements go away from the centre and undermine an existing organization and integration of the self. Each of these movements has positive and negative functions. Decentring movements engage with the increasing diversification of positions, and can potentially facilitate innovation of the self. However, they can lead to disorganization, chaos and fragmentation if they become overly dominant. Centring movements restore the organization of the self when an existing order is disrupted. However, if they become overly dominant, the self is at risk of becoming rigid, fossilized and inflexible. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka highlight that while centring movements are characteristic of the postmodern model, his dialogical self model is constructed in such a way that it can incorporate both types of movements and, therefore, negotiate between modern and postmodern perspectives.

> Narrative, conceived as a multiplicity of *I-positions*, means, in fact, that *each I*, as an author, has its own story to tell. This implies that there is not a single and final ending. Rather, a complex narrative with ongoing dialogical relationships between several positions assumes an open process that resists not only a final unification, but also a final completion. (Hermans and Kempen 1993:60)

4.4 White and Epston's Narrative Therapy: 'Storying' and 'Re-Storying" Lives

Interaction with more knowledgeable others is crucial for this process, as surmised in the Vygotskian notion of the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). This zone is characterized by the distance between what the child can learn and achieve independently and what is possible for the child to learn and achieve in collaboration with others. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky 1986: 86). Traversing this zone is a challenge for a child and is predicated on the child's ability to distance himself or herself from the immediacy of his or her experience. According to Vygotsky this process needs to be mediated by a caretaker who will break the task into manageable operations and 'scaffold' the journey for the child.

Drawing on Vygotsky's ideas about the mediating role of concepts and the notion of the ZPD, White in his last work defines the essence of the therapeutic process as 'scaffolding', in which the therapist's role is precisely that: constructing a scaffold for a therapeutic conversation to take place. An important aspect of such an intervention is to introduce the idea that concepts (such as self-determination, self-esteem, freedom) do not represent essences but rather should be understood as cultural tools, which can be used to organize behavior. White characterizes such procedures as 'distancing' and postulates several potential levels of distancing – from low to very high- within therapeutic conversation. Furthermore, drawing on Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD, and the fact that foray into this zone is only possible in collaboration with a significant other, White conceptualizes the therapeutic progress and process as a traversing of such a zone. The therapist occupies a role similar to the role of the significant other who provides 'the sort of conversational partnership that supports people in proceeding in manageable steps' (White 2007:275). The therapeutic aim is now defined as a rich story development, which mirrors in a way "thick description' of the initial stage, but is decisively future orientated and open-ended.

5.2 'Narrative Identity Empiricized': Protocols for Narrating the Self

However, for McAdams, adopting a narrative approach does not require a reconsideration of the underlying tenets of mainstream psychology; it is yet another model that can be incorporated without questioning the major assumptions of how science gets done- such as that the object exists independently of knowledge, that narrative methods can reveal a consistent and coherent representation of reality that is independent of the methods themselves, and that the researcher can stay neutral in the process of acquiring knowledge about it.

The methodology developed by McAdams to conduct research on narrative identity starts with collecting stories. However, the collection of stories for McAdams is a guided, controlled and structured process.

5.3 The Dialogical Self Theory, Valuation Theory and the Self-Confrontation Method

Valuation theory is supposed to being together story, telling and motivation of the guiding metaphor as parts of an articulated conceptual system:

> The central concept, 'valuation' refers both to the process of meaning construction and its product in which the events of a self-narrative are organized. A valuation has a positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant) or ambivalent connotation in the eyes of the individual. Personal valuations, as subjective constructions of personal experiences, refer to a broad range of phenomena such as: a dear memory, a pleasant activity, a good talk with a friend, a disappointment in the contact with a significant other, a particular source of satisfaction in one's work, a physical handicap, an unreachable ideal, etc. During different periods of one's life, different valuations may emerge because one's reference point is constantly changing. As a result of the act of self-reflection different valuations are brought together into an organized valuation system in which one valuation is given a more prominent place than another. (Hermans 2002:6)

In the sense elaborated by Bakhtin, dialogical communication is not only a multiplicity and diversity of voices, a "heteroglossia", but an act of (and an active) listening to each voice from the perspective of the others, a "dialogized heteroglossia'. Furthermore, the context in which dialogical interaction takes place (not acknowledge in Hermans's research) has a tremendous weight in Bakhtinian elaborations of the theory. In 'The Problem of Speech Genres', Bakhtin (1986) claims that the sentence considered as a unit of language in traditional disciplines, has only the context of the speech of one speaking (or writing) subject. The utterance, in contrast, considered as a unit of spoken (or written) communication, is situated within the framing context of an exchange of speaking (or writing) subjects. Thus, the utterance, unlike the sentence, correlates directly with 'the extraverbal context of reality (situation, setting, prehistory)' and with the utterances of other speakers (Bakhtin 1986: 73). As 'a link in the chain of speech communication', the utterance has several distinguishing characteristics: a referentially semantic element (its theme), an expressive element (the speaker or writer's attitude towards the theme) and, most importantly, an element of responsiveness or '*addressivity*' (its relation to other utterances) (Bakhtin 1986: 84, 90, 91, 95).

5.4 The Maps of Narrative Practice

While the text analogy provides a frame that allows White and Epston to consider a broader socio-political context in which the storied lives unfold, as understood through the intertextual metaphor, it also enables them to include a consideration of power in its operation and effects on lives and relationships.

White and Epston maintain that as we are all caught up in a system of power/knowledge and that it is not possible to cut ourselves apart from this domain, we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others. However, they warn that this does not imply that all persons are equal in the exercise of power, nor that some do not suffer its subjugating effects more than others.

They further interrogate the notion of subjugated knowledge and the two classes of subjugated knowledge Foucault distinguished: 'erudite' knowledge that has been 'written out; through the ascendance of a more global and unitary knowledge, and 'local popular' or 'indigenous' knowledge that is currently in circulation but is denied recognition and status. White and

Epston then unpack and outline the profound methodological implications of this cluster of ideas for the psychological practices in general and in particular for the elaboration of narrative therapy.

Thus, we can distinguish two broad types of knowledge effectively used within White and Epston's approach: the meta-knowledge about the procedures that encompass their practice; and the discursive formulations that they receive from people who consult them about their difficulties. Since White and Epston reject the interpretative imperative, the narratives that people who consult them share with them are acknowledged and addressed in therapy at face value, in a mode that Bruner defined as 'folk-psychology': the way in which ordinary people talk about, reflect and construe 'how people tick'. It is of critical significance for White and Epston that this knowledge should be received, preserved and utilized in its idiosyncratic formulation, the narrative constructed by each individual person. Therefore, the therapeutic procedures that they follow are described and formulated in such a way as to protect the singularity of the individually generated knowledge they are dealing with. These procedures therefore also concern the modes and directions of the interventions, without defining their content in advance.

On the metatheoretical, self-reflective level, White and Epston's methodology encompasses three aspects: separating from unitary knowledge; challenging the techniques of power; and resurrecting subjugated knowledge. In pursing these three broad goals White and Epston make the narrative, textual and discursive construction of experiences that have been labelled problematic their main focus and primary instrument. Their programme of intervention begins with the step that they define as the 'externalization of the problem'. In essence, externalization of the problem is aimed at making their discursive and narrative construction visible (Roth and Epston 1996a, b). It seeks to expose the way the language imploded to describe a problem in effect shapes and maintains that problem by, on the one hand, legitimizing and naturalizing it and on the other by objectification, 'thingification' and disempowering the client. In doing so, White and Epston acknowledge that their actions as therapists have performative and constructive power. Their first radical intervention is the refusal to accept the labelling of the person who consults them as problematic, sick or dysfunctional. Through externalization, the problem is constructed as an entity separate from the person, thus fundamentally disrupting the unifying signification typically and causally imposed by mainstream psychology. The externalization of the problem also entails the mapping of the problem's influence in a person's life and relationship and the examining of the demands that the problem makes on the person. For example, working through the problem presentation of self-hate, White does not ask such questions as, 'Why do you hate yourself?' or 'What makes you experience self-hate?', which by their structure and content reinforce the identification between the person and the problem, but rather explores 'what self-hate told the client about herself and what it required her to do to her body', and then identifies 'self-hate's agenda for the client's life, its attitude towards her, and its [the problem's] ways of speaking' and proceeds to questioning the requirements of self-hate (white 2007:56).

Externalization of the problem allows them to move to the next phase in their therapeutic process: challenging the techniques of power. In this case, White and Epston address the effect of power on an inter-individual level of operation, the power that the problem itself exerts over the person through its discursive formulation, defining it as 'the requirements for the problem's survival' (White and Epston 1990: 30). White and Epston's aim in this stage is to explore the

way in which the problem appears to compel persons to treat themselves and others in a certain way. White and Epston argue that it is always possible to find ‘unique outcomes’ with regard to the oppressive work of any psychological problem. ‘Unique outcomes’ represent moments when a person could have subjected him or herself or others to the techniques of power utilized by the problem but refused to do so. ‘Unique outcomes’ thus demonstrate the resilience of the person and become a starting point for generating alternative stories, which represent the third phase of therapeutic intervention.

Identification of ‘unique outcomes’ relies on mobilization of ‘thick description’, the methodological procedure that was inspired by Geertz’s work and poststructuralist critique of the dichotomy of deep structure versus surface manifestation more generally.

Making such facets of experience visible through thick description allows people to formulate alternative stories. Alternative stories begin to incorporate vital and previously neglected aspects of people’s lived experience, and thus challenge the ‘truths’ that specify their lives and protest their subjugation to unitary knowledge.

5.5 Conclusion

As the analysis in this chapter demonstrates, McAdams’s, Hermans’s and White and Epston’s methodological positions are significantly different. One way of accounting for these differences is provided by Murray’s (2000) model of narrative analysis, comprised of four levels: personal, interpersonal, positional and ideological. The personal level of narrative analysis explores the individual, idiosyncratic and phenomenological, and encompasses the themes and structure of the main narrative in the person’s life. On the interpersonal level, narrative is thought of in terms of a communication process and is concerned with its addressees – whether in the local research context or broader social interaction. On the positional level of analysis, the interpersonal is extended to include the differences in social positioning resulting from cultural and institutional prescriptions that shape and delimit the construction of personal identities. The ideological level is concerned with the effect of power on individuals’ narratives and subjectivities. Adopting this frame of analysis, it can be seen that while McAdams’s methodology addresses the personal level, Hermans’s engages with personal, the interpersonal and positional levels. Only in White and Epston’s work, however, are the challenges of the ideological level met squarely.